

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 14, 2013

Agenda Item: HD 455 and 121-30 Bighorn Sheep Hunts

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

Bighorn sheep hunting was reopened in hunting districts 455 in 2005. The old hunt area encompassed the Beartooth Wildlife Management area and the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area. In 2005, the hunt area boundary was expanded to include the bighorn sheep herd south of the Cascade (Sheep Creek drainage). Hunters from 2005 to 2010 had excellent opportunities to harvest an older age class ram, with numerous rams in the population. A die-off during the winter of 2010 caused a 50-75 percent loss in the herd. The sheep-license holder in 2011 hunted 30 days, harvesting a large full curl ram, but mentioned observing only a handful of ½-curl and older rams. The 2012 sheep-license holder had a tough time finding rams. Area landowner and personal observations are similar. FWP proposes to close the HD 455 bighorn sheep hunt until sheep numbers rebound and older age class rams become available.

The HD 121 bighorn sheep population has been declining for five years. Potential causes of the decline include highway mortality and the possibility of higher mountain lion predation. Ewe licenses offered for HD 121-30 were reduced to 1 during 2011 and 2012. FWP proposes closing the ewe hunt (eliminating HD 121-30). The either-sex hunt (HD 121-00) would remain with 1 license.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period ran through 5 p.m., Jan. 28. FWP received nine comments. The comments revealed both support and opposition to the proposed closure.

Alternatives and Analysis

The changes may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2012 (status quo) as per staff justifications, public comment and/or commission discussion.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Given the observed population sizes, measured declines, and guidance in the Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy, FWP proposes and supports the closures.

Proposed Motion

I move the FWP Commission adopt the final bighorn sheep season changes as presented by FWP.